REMARKS

In response to the official action:

[1-3] Claims 1-4 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 as being unpatentable over Matsumoto (U.S. Patent 5,621,659) in view of Fukuda (JP 10-233056). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Matsumoto in Fig. 1A shows a control system, built into a TV for interconnecting it to various electronic devices (Video Tape Recorder VTR, Multi-Disk Player MDP) that are shown in Fig. 1B. The cables that connect these devices include an audio signal line. Inside the TV, a control bus 9 is coupled to a microcomputer 2 by connections (buffers) 5 and 6 and to respective microcomputers (11 and 22 in Fig. 1B), which are located in each of the devices, through connections 5a, 6a, 5b, 6b, 5c, and 6c. The devices are given codes that identify them on the bus (column 7, line 66 to column 8, line 3) and commands are cross-checked against the device identity (column 8, lines 30-38). Both commands and device-status inquiries are sent over the bus. Connections are checked and the status of the devices is displayed (Fig. 13).

The Examiner relies on Matsumoto for disclosing the features of claim 1 except for the feature of muting the sound, and relies on Fukuda for muting.

Fukuda, in paragraph [0013] at the bottom of page 2 of the text, discusses the "input edges" 1a-1n in Fig. 1(which appear to be input connectors) and their respective connections to detecting elements 2a-2n that detect whether a device is connected to the respective connector.

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Still referring to Fig. 1, Fukuda continues at the top of page 3, in paragraph [0014], that "mute circuits 3a-3n are respectively formed between the output switch circuits 4 from the input edges [connectors] 1a-1n of two or more channels. An operator does mute release, switches the mute circuit of only the input edge which carried out the selection input by the selection key 9, and specified the input edge displayed on the display 8, and connects with a circuit. Any signals other than the channel set up since the mute circuit of a channel where the connection state of the input edge and outgoing end which were connected with other electronic equipment which is not selected is not selected was maintained are not outputted." The Examiner has highlighted this passage, which states that the mute circuits are controlled by the operator, and it is the operator who selects, from a list on a display 8, the channel to be un-muted channel.

In paragraph [0019], Fukuda continues, "An operator sets up a ... output condition, such as selection of the mute circuits 3a-3n ... by the selection key 9." This also shows that muting is not performed automatically, but instead is performed by the operator.

In paragraph [0021] the Examiner appears to have highlighted "a microcomputer 7 controls the mute circuit 3." The full sentence reads, "a microcomputer 7 controls the mute circuit 3 and the output switch circuit 4 according to the connection conditions ... which were memorized in the memory of a microcomputer 7." Fig. 1of Fukuda shows that microcomputer 7 receives

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signals only from the detection circuits 2a-2n and the selection keys 9, and sends signals to the muting circuits 3a-3n.

Fukuda discloses muting all circuits except for those selected by the operator. The muting is performed by the microcomputer 7; but the un-muting *selection* is entirely a human choice, made by the operator (and therefore so is the muting selection). Amended claim 1 recites "muting means, comprised in the signal processing means, for *automatically* reducing substantially to zero the sound volume of the audio signal *selected by the control circuit*" (emphasis added).

The Examiner is invited to consider that Fukuda does not disclose means for automatic muting when a component does not answer an automatic inquiry, but only for un-muting on the command of a human. The Applicants again respectfully point out that paragraph [0014] of Fukuda teaches maintaining muting on all channels except the one selected by a human.

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